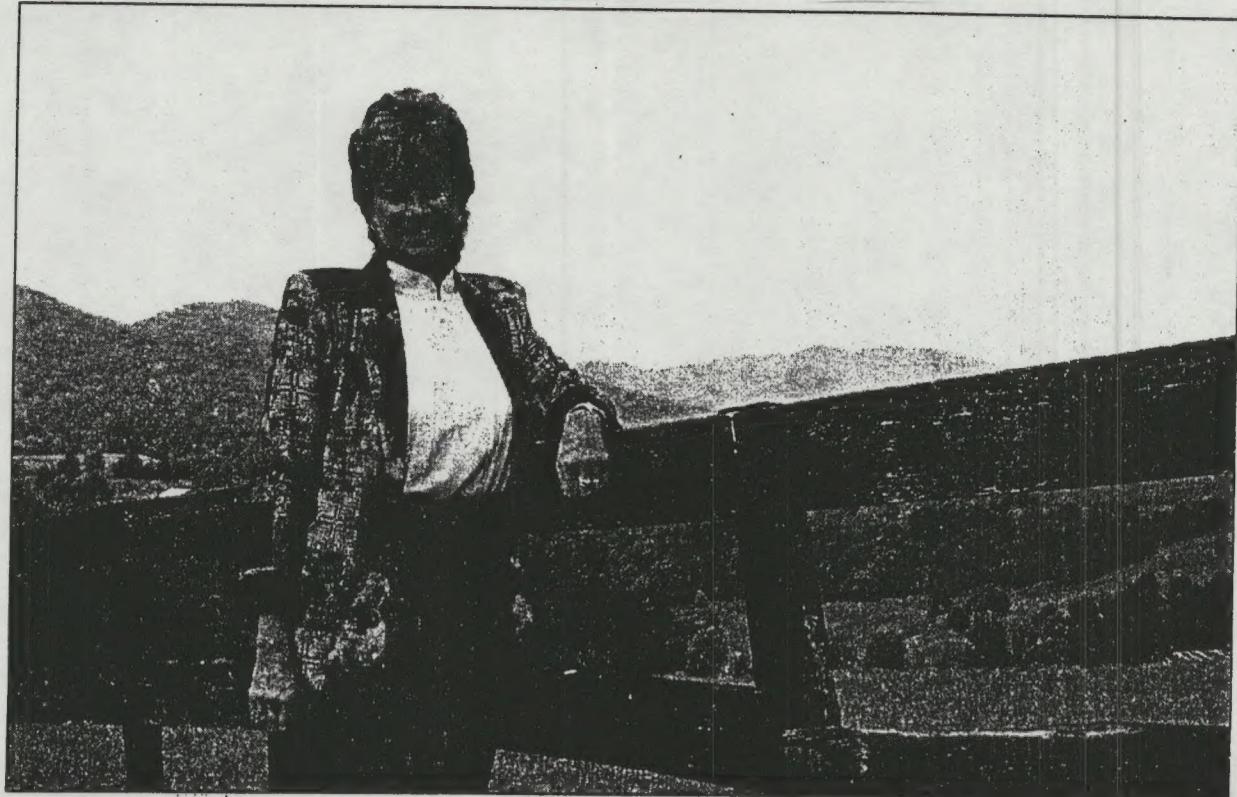


Holistic environmental chamber, where participants listen to tapes.

The Monroe Institute gets in sync with human consciousness



F. Holmes Atwater, director of research at the Monroe Institute, monitors brain waves.



The Daily Progress/Miriam Brodersen

Laurie Monroe is following in her father's footsteps. She is president of the Monroe Institute in Nelson.



Robert Monroe

"What we offer here is a wonderful gift and experience that people can give to themselves ... One of the last things my father told me before he died was 'Get it out there.' "

Laurie A. Monroe,
president of Robert Monroe's institute

Daily Progress photos by Miriam Brodersen

The Monroe Institute gets in sync with human consciousness

By DAVID A. MAURER
Daily Progress staff writer

In a booth of total darkness, a voyager settled into the warm softness of a water bed.

As he relaxed, the soothing sound of ocean surf began to come through his earphones. After a few minutes, the sound of the ocean waves faded and gave way to an agreeable rushing sound that carried barely audible, complex electronic signals designed to alter brain-wave states.

Thousands of people believe these combinations of multiplexed audio sounds have helped them cross thresholds into altered states of consciousness. This auditory guidance system, Hemi-Sync, is a technology developed by the late Robert A. Monroe.

In 1974 Monroe started to conduct learning seminars in self-control of human consciousness at various sites in the United States and abroad. Then in 1979 he established the Monroe Institute in Nelson County as a base from which to continue his research and teaching.

Over the years, people from around the world have explored the Hemi-Sync technology through the use of audio cassettes or CDs. Each year about 1,000 people choose to visit the institute to take part in one of five different six-day residential programs.

Some visitors to the complex nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains tell of profound experiences that result in heightened awareness of themselves and a new

appreciation for the potential of the human mind.

"The programs offer you a great opportunity to discover the things that you don't know that you don't know," said Jeffry Robertson, a local real estate developer and graduate of all five residential programs. "These programs have helped to show me how limited my belief systems were."

"I would also say that, since I've taken these programs, a lot of my focus on the entire material world has shifted a great deal. I'm less concerned with making more money or doing another project or having accomplishments that just look good."

"I'm now more concerned with what I'm actually feeling, and I have shifted a lot more out of the 'do' mode and into the 'be' mode. This involves spending a little more time with myself and tuning in to what actually brings me joy or provides quality in my life."

Such fundamental changes in people have caused some to think that the Monroe Institute is home to a New Age cult or religious group. But, as Monroe was fond of pointing out, there aren't any people walking around the grounds with robes on.

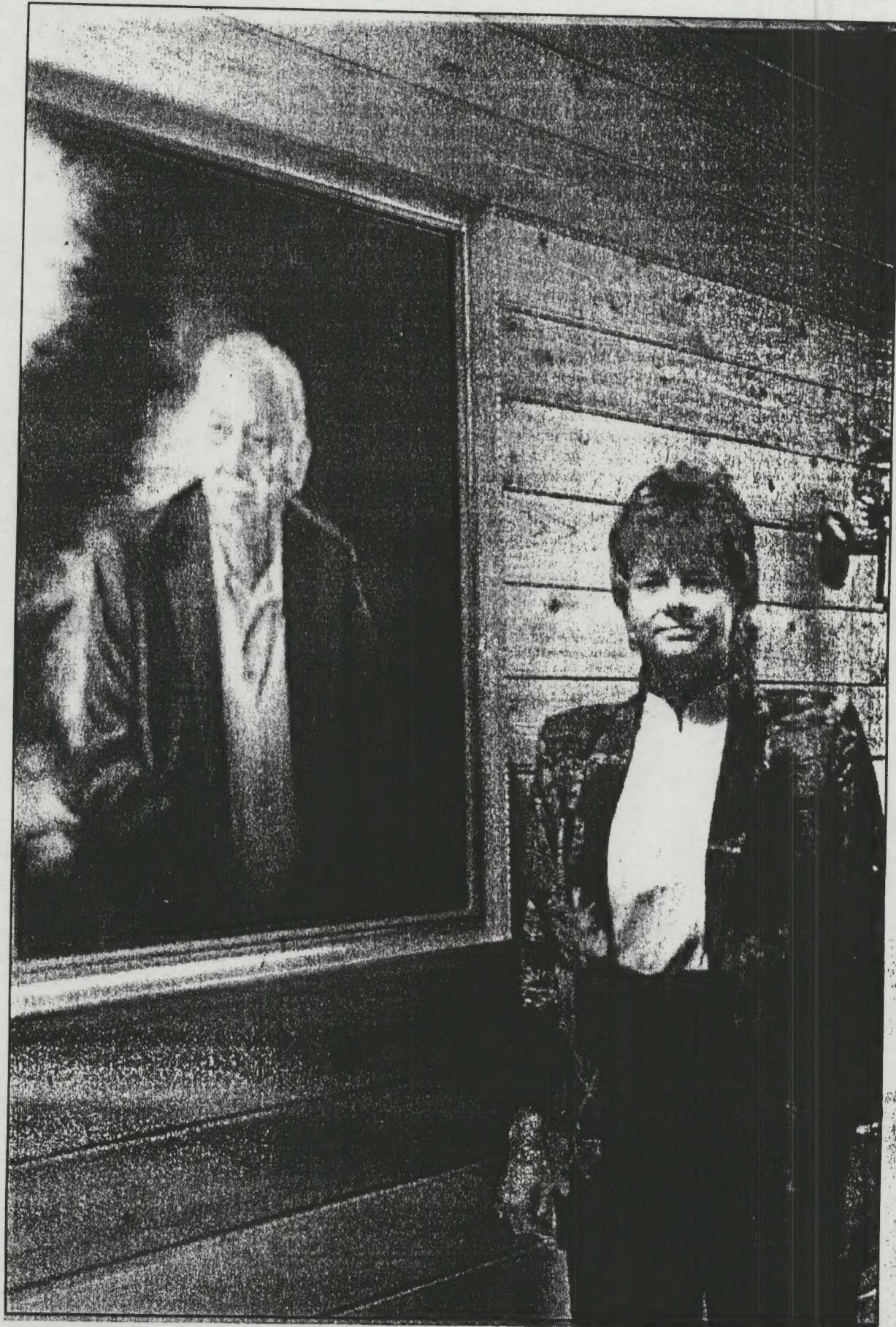
Laurie A. Monroe, the president of the institute and Monroe's daughter, said the nonprofit organization is far from being a cult or religion bent on recruiting new members.

"Here at the institute we espouse no dogma or religious views whatsoever," Ms. Monroe, said in her office. "We are involved in research and education that has to do with the exploration of human consciousness."

"The only thing that we ask people to consider is that they are more than their physical body. Although our Hemi-Sync tapes can help facilitate a person moving into altered states of consciousness, the tapes themselves don't do anything."

"Our approach does not utilize hypnosis or subliminal suggestions of any kind. My father often said, 'Only you can change you,' and what people basically go through here is a process of self-discovery."

See MONROE on E5



Monroe

Continued from E1

Ms. Monroe's father was born on Oct. 30, 1915, in Wabash, Ind. His mother was a medical doctor and his father was a college professor.

After receiving a degree from Ohio State University, where he majored in engineering and journalism, Monroe entered the radio broadcasting field as a writer and director.

In 1939 he moved to New York City, where he started RAM Enterprises, a company that produced radio shows. The first radio program Monroe aired on NBC radio was the prime-time railroad adventure series, "Rocky Gordon."

In 1956 Monroe created a small research and development division in his company to study the feasibility of learning during sleep. Although it was this work that got him interested in human consciousness, it was a series of frightening out-of-body experiences that started in the spring of 1958 that got Monroe interested in altered states of consciousness.

Each of Monroe's out-of-body episodes would begin with what he called "odd vibrations." At first he thought he might be experiencing some sort of seizure or brain disorder.

A checkup by the family doctor and subsequent visits to psychiatrists and psychologists provided no explanation for the phenomenon. The down-to-earth businessman with no spiritual inclinations decided he would have to discover what was occurring on his own.

Monroe started experimenting with ways to induce these altered states of consciousness and eventually developed an auditory system he called hemispheric synchronization or Hemi-Sync. He received three patents for the methods and techniques he developed for inducing and controlling altered states of consciousness with the use of sound.

Monroe also documented his out-of-body explorations in three books, "Journeys Out of the Body," "Far Journeys" and "Ultimate Journey." But his daughter said the institute is about a lot more than journeying out of one's body.

"Probably the biggest misconception people have of the institute is that if they come here they will have an out-of-body experience," Ms. Monroe said.

"We can't guarantee that, because one of the greatest things a person has to overcome is fear. When these out-of-body experiences first started happening to my father, he was afraid he was dying. Because of the human survival instinct, when it starts happening, people often panic and then they're right back in their bodies.

"The movement is much greater than having an out-of-body experience. My father said in his later books, especially in 'Ultimate Journey,' that it's not so much going out of the body as it is a shift in consciousness."

A.J. Honeycutt, the director of operations at the institute and Monroe's stepson, often uses music as an analogy to help explain how the Hemi-Sync system works.

"We know that music is a manipulative device," said Honeycutt as he walked across the groomed grounds of the retreat. "Music raises our spirits when we're singing in church and the scary music in a movie can affect us in a different way."

"Hemi-Sync is just a step removed from that. We know that the nature of sound vibrations have an effect on us and, within that context, we try to understand how it works."

"Our basic premise is that if you establish some kind of alignment between brain hemispheres, you get a larger capacity to focus on whatever particular thing it is you are trying to do."

For the past decade, F. Holmes Atwater has been the director of research at the Monroe Institute. Of all the people at the institute, he is probably the best able to explain how this alignment is achieved.

"The sound process involves a system of what is known as binaural beats," Atwater said, as he cued up a program of such beats on a sophisticated control panel in the institute's research laboratory.

"Binaural beats were not invented or discovered by Bob Monroe, they are simply a physiological fact. Human beings have two ears, so they hear binaurally

"When you put earphones on and play two tones of just a little bit different frequency from one ear to another — for example, 500 cycles and 504 cycles — the brain processes that information and creates the illusion of hearing a third sound or a binaural beat."

Atwater said Monroe discovered that, like music, these binaural beats give off warbling or vibrato sounds that can alter consciousness. He said that by listening to a different combination of sound and different binaural beats, a person can gain access to different levels of consciousness.

"One of the biggest misconceptions is that there's some power or strength to the tapes," Atwater said. "People want to crank up the volume, 'Give me more power. Do it to me.'

"But the tapes are really very gentle and only change your specific state of arousal. When people come off an experience and say, 'Oh, that was so wonderful, I have to have that tape,' they don't realize that the experience isn't in the tape but in them."

"We often refer to the tapes as training wheels. The tapes are something that helps you keep your balance and gets you there, but at some point, you want to take those training wheels off and fly free."

Through the institute's Interstate Industries Inc., more than 200 Hemi-Sync-based products are manufactured and distributed through more than 600 retail dealers and by mail order. Most of these products are audio tapes that are designed to help people with everything from overcoming math phobia to getting a good night sleep to a surgical support series that is designed to ease the experience of medical and dental treatment.



Robert Monroe

While the home-use tapes are helpful and a way to reach out to people around the world, Atwater said, the most powerful experiences occur during the six-day programs.

The residential program begins with Gateway Voyage, a prerequisite for taking the other four programs. Designed to introduce people to the Hemi-Sync system, this initial course moves students through different levels of consciousness while helping them to discover their ability to experience things beyond the limitations of the five physical senses.

The other programs, Guidelines, Lifeline, Heartline and Exploration 27, each offer a different focus of self-discovery.

"The people who come to the institute have a diverse background in terms of what their needs are for being here," Honeycutt said.

"We might have a New York executive who is trying to relax again, a writer who wants to establish a more profound sense of creativity or folks with emotional situations they want to process and get through in a safe environment.

"We really try to maintain a neutral posture and let people get out of the program what they came here for, as opposed to espousing any belief system. When you go through this process, you can have certain beliefs in life. The key is to take those beliefs and turn them into knowns. This process can help you do that."

Sandy Kalaora, a Richmond resident, has taken most of the six-day courses offered at the institute. She said she heard about the institute through word-of-mouth. After going through Gateway Voyage, she said that she was so impressed she wanted to do more.

"The experiences I had while in altered states of consciousness were incredible," Kalaora said. "My intuitiveness has opened up more and more and each course is like opening another door."

"When I took the Heartline program, I was able to face one of my greatest fears, which was letting myself get close to people. It also helped me to express myself."

"When I took the Lifeline program, I actually met people who have died and were caught between this reality and the light. I was actually able to help guide these people into the light, which was very rewarding for me."

Many people will pooh-pooh the idea that living people can travel back and forth into other realities. But for those who believe, the frontier of the unknown is filled with wondrous possibilities for further exploration.

"For the last five years, we've been documenting through scientific publications and peer review journals the actual effect the sound has on the brain waves," Atwater said.

"We're now going to be moving away from that dimension and doing what is called state-specific science. We're actually going to be using these tools we've developed to explore these different realms."

"If one accepts that we survive after death, then what kind of dimensions would we be in, and what would that be like? There's no doubt that this technology provides access to those realms, so we're going to start mapping, exploring and describing them."

Although such goals might seem farfetched and even crazy to some, other people are very interested in the possibilities. The institute continues to grow and the finishing touches are being put on a new retreat area on the 800-acre grounds.

People from around the world pay \$1,495 for the six-day courses, which includes food, lodging and transportation from the local airport. Ms. Monroe said the interest that people have in the institute is reflected in the fact that its website is getting more than 200,000 hits a month.

"What we offer here is a wonderful gift and experience that people can give to themselves," Ms. Monroe said. "Daddy used to say that the greatest illusion is that man has limitations."

"If we can learn to get out of this box that we sometimes put ourselves in and look beyond that, and look at life from a different perspective and have a different overview, that in itself can be the gift."

"One of the last things my father told me before he died was, 'Get it out there.' He realized the benefit to humankind of not only the programs but of the tapes."

Each "voyager" who rests on the undulating water bed in his or her individual cubicle will have a different experience. Some might not have any out-of-the-ordinary experiences at all.

"When people ask me if this technology will work for them, I tell them to spend \$9.95 and get this little tape called 'The Way of Hemi-Sync,'" Atwater said.

"It's a cassette tape you can use in your home and it demonstrates the technology. I suggest they listen to it three times and if they find it doesn't work for them, they can send it back for a refund."

"If they find it's working for them, they can move on from there to the Gateway Experience tapes or come here for the Gateway Voyage. I think everyone has potential, but they shouldn't just jump into the program without checking it out first."

When Monroe died from complications due to pneumonia on March 17, 1995, he was well-known for his research into human consciousness. He also was a respected businessman, having owned two radio stations in Richmond and being one of the founders of Jefferson Cable in Charlottesville and Waynesboro.

Monroe's accomplishments in the conventional world helped him to be taken seriously in his study of human consciousness. When visitors to the center relax on the water beds and let their minds run free, they are continuing the search for knowledge that Monroe started more than 40 years ago.

"One of man's greatest fears is death," Ms. Monroe said. "One of the most important things we do here at the institute is to show people that there is nothing to fear, because they will survive physical death."

"We move people into different states of consciousness, and they learn that they're more than their physical body, because they're able to perceive things beyond their five physical senses. We give them the tools to do this."

"I think these tools are the most precious gift of my father's legacy."

Those interested in learning more can type <http://www.monroeinstitute.org/> to gain access to the Monroe Institute's website or call 361-1252.